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In His Own Words: Address at the March on Washington, 1963

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*In His Own Words***Address at the March on Washington, 1963***by Eugene Carson Blake*

I wish, indeed, that I were able to speak for all Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox Christians as I speak here today in behalf of full justice and freedom for all who are born or living under the American flag. But that is precisely the point. If all the members and all the ministers of the constituency I represent here today were ready to stand and march with you for jobs and freedom for the Negro community together with those of the Roman Catholic Church and of the synagogues in America, then the battle for full civil rights and dignity would be already won.

I do, however, in fact represent officially the Commission on Religion and Race of the National Council of Churches. And I am honored to be here in the highest tradition of that council and of the churches that constitute it, thus to represent one of the sponsoring bodies of this march for jobs and freedom.

For many years now the National Council of Churches and most of its constituent communions have said all the right things about civil rights. Our official pronouncements for years have called for a non-segregated church in a non-segregated society but as of August 28, 1963, we have achieved neither a non-segregated church nor a non-segregated society and it is partly because the churches of America have failed to put

their own houses in order, that 100 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, 175 years after the adoption of the Constitution, 173 years after the adoption of the Bill of Rights, the United States of America still faces a racial crisis.

We do not, therefore, come to this Lincoln Memorial in any arrogant spirit of moral or spiritual superiority to set the Congress or the nation straight or to judge or to denounce the American people in whole or in part. Rather we come—late, late we come—in the reconciling and repentant spirit in which Abraham Lincoln of Illinois once replied to a delegation of morally arrogant churchmen who came to see him. He said: “Never say God is on our side, rather say that we may be found on God’s side.” We come in the fear of God that moved Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, whose memorial stands across the lagoon, once to say: “Indeed I tremble for my country, when I reflect that God is just.”

Yes, we come to march behind and with these amazingly able leaders of the Negro American who, to the shame of almost every white American, have alone and without us mirrored the suffering of the cross of Jesus Christ. They have offered their bodies to arrest and violence, to the hurt and indignity of firehoses and dogs, of derisions and of

From *Speeches by the Leaders...the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963* (New York: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1963).

poverty and some death for this just cause.

We come and late we come, but we come to present ourselves this day, our souls and bodies, to be a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is our reasonable service in a kind of tangible, visible sacrament which alone in times like these can manifest to a troubled world the grace that is available at communion table or high altar. We come in prayer that we in our time may be more worthy to bear the name our tongues so fluently profess. We come in faith that the God who made us and gave His Son for us

and for our salvation will overrule the fears and hatred that so far have prevented the establishment of full racial justice in our beloved country. We come in hope that those who have marched today are but a token of a new and massive, high determination of all men of religion and of patriotism to win in this nation under God liberty and justice for all. And we come—late we come—we come in that love revealed in Jesus Christ which reconciles into true community all men of every color, race and nation who respond in faith and obedience to Him.

In His Own Words

A Proposal Towards the Reunion of Christ's Church

by Eugene Carson Blake

This is a significant occasion. When I received the gracious invitation from your Dean and Bishop to preach in this pulpit, on this particular morning, it became clear to me at once that the occasion demanded not only as good a sermon as God might enable me to prepare and preach, but also a sermon that would deal with the unity of the church of Jesus Christ realistically—neither glossing over divisions with politeness nor covering them with optimistic generalities.

Led, I pray by the Holy Spirit, I propose to the Protestant Episcopal Church that it together with the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America invite the Methodist Church and the United Church of Christ to form with us a plan of church union both catholic and reformed on the basis of

the principles I shall later in this sermon suggest. Any other churches which find that they can accept both the principles and plan would also be warmly invited to unite with us.

I hasten to make it clear that at this stage this is not an official proposal. My position as Stated Clerk of my church's General Assembly gives me no authority to make such a proposal officially on behalf of my church. I speak this morning as one of the ministers of my church privileged and required to preach under the word of God. I speak as a minister especially privileged (and therefore under a special requirement) to have represented my communion for the past nine years in many formal and informal relationships with other communions both inside and outside the ecumenical movement. I

From *Ecumenical Review* 38 (April 1986): 140–148.